

## AGRICULTURAL GRADUATES' PERCEIVED ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT IN SRI LANKA

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Entrepreneurship has become one of the major drives in many economies. The job market is becoming more complex and dynamic than ever before. It demands dynamic entrepreneurial skills and professional capabilities from graduates globally. In this context, entrepreneurial skills have become highly important to keep pace with the current complex and dynamic job market. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the association between entrepreneurial skills and type of employment among agricultural graduates. The study employed an online survey of agricultural graduates of one of the Sri Lankan universities who are in their first two years of graduation. A set of 11 entrepreneurial skills were measured using 68 statements with a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1= Not at all competent to 5= Extremely competent. According to the results, more than half of (52%) the agricultural graduates were unemployed during their first two years of graduation. Almost half of the employed graduates were employed in non-agriculture sector. Principal component analysis revealed eight key skills. They are marketing skills, decision-making, critical thinking, innovation and creativity, teamwork and leadership, ability to exploit new opportunities, planning/organizing skills and risk-taking. Application of ordered probit regression model on key skills indicated that the type of employment of agricultural graduates was significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) associated with three key entrepreneurial skills; critical thinking ability, leadership and teamwork skills and planning/organising skills. The results suggest that graduates possess key entrepreneurial skills and three of them are significantly influence to be employed in a professional/managerial position. Therefore, the observed high rate of unemployment could be a result of low rate of job creation in the economy to absorb fresh graduates. Therefore, system-wide interventions including new investments to initiate more employment opportunities, encouraging graduates to develop their own business, and conducting regular employer surveys to understand changing skill requirements are important.

**Keywords:** Agricultural graduates, Employment, Entrepreneurial skills, Entrepreneurship